LECTURES AND MEETINGS ON THE GAS MOVEMENT.

While adverting, briefly for the present, to a recent lecture of Mr. Wright's, in the Westminster Mechanics' Institution, we may just instance the evidence which the 'Progress at Slough,' detailed in last week's Builder, affords of the power which lecturers possess of forwarding any great movement of so popular and universal an interest as the gas movement is, and more particularly will be. The hint, we are assured, will not be thrown away on so intelligent, nay, talented, and laborious a class of men as we know professional lecturers to be. We do believe that a fairer, a wider, a more fruitful subject-field than this for popular lecturing throughout England and Scotland at this moment, probably does not exist. It is a subject which, directly and sensitively, affects the pockets and the comforts of the million, and these are ever the lecturer's surest stronghold and stay. The lecture of Mr. Wright, however, did not so much relate to the economics or statistics of gas as to its history, and, indeed, the history of artificial light in general. Any portions of it for which we may find room in The Builder, will be most appropriately introduced in connection with the subject of the domestic uses of gas.

A literal multitude, it appears, of gas consumers, would-be gas consumers, and others interested, flocked to the Southwark Literary Institution, Borough-road, on Friday evening of last week, in prompt response to the advertisement announcing a public meeting on the 'gas movement.' 'The matter,' observes the *Morning Advertiser*, 'seemed to excite very lively and general interest, as, before the time appointed for taking the chair, the large theatre of the Institution was nearly filled, and in the course of the evening became inconveniently crowded, hundreds being unable to obtain admittance.'

As we were not present, we cannot say much about the evidence and arguments adduced, but we perceive from the reports in the *Times*, *Post*, *Advertiser*, &c., that they were mainly our own, and the respectability and importance of the meeting were authenticated by the presence of an M.P., Mr. Pearson, as their chairman. Mr. Thwaites is said to have 'entered [we here quote chiefly from the condensed report in the *Times*] into a long and able statement as to the cost of producing gas. He adverted to the fact of nearly all the principal towns in Yorkshire being supplied at the rate of 3s. 3½d. per 1,000 cubic feet, and to the fact that even in the very large manufacturing towns the price did not exceed 4s. to 4s. 6d. The gas companies had consented to lower their charges from 8s. to 7s. per 1,000 feet; but that was not enough, for the same gas that they were to pay 7s. for, and for which they at present paid 8s., was supplied at Greenwich by the same company at 6s., and to all the railways and other large consumers at 5s. 6d. per 1,000 feet. All the eastern end of the town was supplied at 6s., and why were they to pay more? At the Wakefield House of Correction all the gas consumed was manufactured by the prisoners, and the cost of it was only 5½d. per 1,000 feet.* These were surely facts strong enough to induce them to have their gas supplied at 6s., or to form a consumers' company themselves.' The gas movement, he added, was becoming a most important one, and it would ere long take a strong hold on the public mind, in consequence of the vast amount of the interest involved. Looking to that large meeting, he would say to the gas directors, strike while hot, and do not let the dissatisfaction go further, or the time will come when 6s. will not satisfy. He was beginning to feel discontented with it himself.

The chairman then entered into a statement as to the origin of the gas companies, and remarked, that the competition between them had only caused two or three lines of pipe to be laid down in districts where there was hardly occasion for one. [Such, indeed, as we have ourselves remarked, has hitherto been the almost sole result of that 'wasteful competition' which the monopolists have themselves 'compelled' by their own blind resistance to what they *could* have well done, but *would* not do, for the public interest,—which, as we have always maintained, will be found to be identical with their own.] These lines of pipe constituted a great part of the capital of the companies, and yet their profits upon it—upon that unnecessary outlay—were enormously high. If any gas bill appeared in the House of Commons, he should insist upon the insertion of a clause contained in the Act for the first of all chartered gas companies—passed in 1810—a clause which was afterwards repealed—to the effect that parochial authorities shall have it in their power to purchase the pipes of a company on a valuation by two surveyors, if the company fail to supply a sufficient quantity or quality of gas at a moderate price. If he understood the object of this meeting aright, it was to shew gas directors that if they take an enlarged and comprehensive view of their private interests, they will find that they are coincident with those of the public. Gentlemen interested in the companies had been invited, and would, he felt convinced, receive a fair hearing. A gas contractor, in course of the discussion which followed the chairman's opening address, assured the meeting that the whole question resolved itself into that of the price of coals. [This same question, it will be found in an ensuing number of The Builder, we had incidentally discussed in the second portion of a recent article, intended to have occupied the place of the present notice.]

Two resolutions were proposed and carried by acclamation, expressive of the determination of the meeting to effect a reduction in the price of gas, appointing a committee to act for them, and pledging themselves to support them.

* It has been publicly alleged, on the part of the companies, that in one original instance of this 'secret of the establishment,' we made 'no allowance' for salaries and wages, rent, tear and wear of apparatus, fuel under the retorts, capital invested, &c.; and we are flippantly asked 'why' we 'omitted to refer to them?' We did not omit to refer to them: we expressly alluded to them. To be sure, we remarked, 'that is exclusive of servants' wages, and even, in all probability, of interest on outlay for apparatus and for repairs; but let us suppose that the Wakefield House of Correction gas were sold to the public at as cheap a rate, the actual price charged by the Wakefield Gas Company itself, by the way, except to large consumers, who are specially charged as 'go over these expenses, even in that case, no less than about ten hundred per cent. beyond the actual cost of the gas as sold would be entitled on the public, in order to cover the mere outlay for wages and repairs, and interest, or dividends.' Now the exposition took place in August last, while the organ of the monopolists was in full fig, and yet the public are told, and more the mark!—that it was 'during the two months' suspension of the literary and scientific department' of that publication that we ventured to do so! We began to enlighten the public mind on this important subject, as our readers well know, long before that publication was originated by our own endeavours, and we have had no reason to feel even in the slightest degree daunted ever since, as our continued and persistent endeavours will clearly show. We were ready to reply to any objection wearing the semblance of truth and candour, especially from that quarter; but 'correspondents' or 'investigators,' who have nothing more worthy to produce than can only be recognized for once—the more especially as there is otherwise such a mere presumption and error of fact assertion, some of which is even coolly acknowledged in a postscript, where it is admitted that the charge of omitting to make allowance for the fuel used under the retorts is erroneous, and that the coal for fuel costs only 3s. 6d. per ton, while the coke produced in the retorts sells for 8s. 6d. per ton,'—a fact which we have ourselves long ago noticed as an evidence that the mere cost of coal is no criterion of the price which ought to be charged to the public for gas, and that in many cases gas companies actually gain enormously, even by the very consumption of their coal.

RAILWAY JOTTINGS.

The Bury station of the Eastern Union line is nearly finished from a design by Mr. Sancton Wood, the contracts under Mr. Brassey being taken by Mr. Ogilvie for the main buildings, and by Mr. Trevethan for the shed roof. Its style is Elizabethan, the materials being red and white brick, with stone dressings. Built on a steep acclivity, the pay office is under the rails, and is 54 feet by 36, the ceilings supported by cross iron girders, with moulded ribs and groins, carried by eight iron columns. The platform is covered by a roof in three spans, supported by two lines of twelve iron columns each, 20 feet in height, and trussed with king and queen posts, but without tie-beams, having skylights and steam-louvres along the whole extent, and finished below with curved pendants. The dimensions of the shed are 260 feet by 84, breadth of each platform nearly 15 feet, with four lines of rail between them. Two towers, seventy feet high, are erected at the eastern extremity, for a contrivance to raise and lower the luggage to and from the platform: in these the clock and bell are to be placed. The whole extent of the station is 320 feet by 120, the south façade appearing with Elizabethan gables and grotesque finials, perforated balustrade, and bay windows with ornamental lead lights.——The great Liverpool tunnel is likely to prove more expensive than was at first contemplated. The cutting of a portion to Great Howard-street has been attempted underground; but such has been the ill success, that some of the houses, not only immediately over the cuttings, but at some distance from them, have given way. It is therefore believed that the houses in the streets will have to be pulled down.——The Leeds and York is being re-laid with new rails, chairs, and sleepers. The rail is of new invention, and is considered an improvement on the old, the surface being convex, and presenting much less surface to the wheel, thereby much reducing the friction,—a great desideratum it is thought, and certainly is,—except in peril of collision, or in frost or thaw, or heavy trainage.——A party, amongst whom was Mr. Macgregor, the chairman of the South Eastern Railway, started from Paris on Sunday week, and reached London in twelve hours and fifty minutes.——A meeting of delegates of France, Prussia, and Belgium, was opened on the 7th inst. at Brussels, under the presidency of the Belgian Minister of Public Works, to arrange an international correspondence on the different lines of railway which unite these three kingdoms.

THE SUSPENSION OF WORKS.

'Thousands and tens of thousands of discharged labourers are now roaming about the country idle, and rushing into the metropolis, hesitating not a moment on the way to enter bakers' or other provision shops, and consume the property therein 'upon the premises,' some reckless of all consequences, others by design to provide themselves with board and lodging at the public expense, in prisons rather than in workhouses. The magistrates at some of the metropolitan police courts have been also applied to for assistance on behalf of the more honest or less desperate portion of them: the majority are already literally penniless. In several places, such as at Neath, where the suspension has only recently taken place, the poor fellows have been lounging about the streets and roads in crowds for a whole week, as if waiting patiently for some hopeless job. For the last three weeks one contractor alone there has discharged fifty men each week, and several others are now at a stand; as are now, also, the works on the Huddersfield and Manchester, which there does not appear to have been any intention to suspend, at least on the part of the directors,—the contractors, Messrs. Nowell and Hattersley, having themselves suspended the works, as the *Manchester Guardian* states, in consequence of a heavy balance in their favour remaining unpaid by the company, whom they are about to proceed against at law. Both at the Huddersfield and the Stalybridge end, accordingly, the workmen have been paid off during the past week.——Mr. A. Stafford, M.P., has given notice in the Commons that he feels it his duty to call the attention of the House to the present condition of the labouring classes.——A contemporary proposes something like a modification of Mr. Weale's proposal to turn navvies into armies. "As a preventive against the men becoming burdensome, he suggests that they should be at liberty to enter regiments of engineers, to be disciplined by the ensuing spring, and sent to the colonies to make roads, railroads, &c.; their rations, in the first instance, to be provided by Government. Such as consent, he adds, might afterwards be located along the lines in wooden houses, to be built in the Canadian style, and women might be sent out as emigrants, or free settlers, and married men take their wives; the expense to be repaid on settlement by a trifling rent, sufficient to pay it off in twenty years or so." 200,000 persons might thus, he thinks, be annually sent out, instead of 20,000, as at present.

Great Iron Bridge for Russia.—A contract having been entered into between the Russian Government and Mr. Vignoles, engineer, for an iron suspension-bridge, to be erected over the Dnieper, [at Kieff, the first shipment of machines and ironwork was lately made at Liverpool, in the British barque, *Flirt*, Mr. A. Dove, master. The articles shipped consist of various massive pieces of iron, of prepared forms, in packages numbered from 1 to 320, and weighing in all 274 tons. They consist of sheeting pile and foundation pile-weights, 5-inch diameter shafts and couplings, cylindrical pieces and stands, with bolted pedestals, besides fourteen cases of bolts and nuts. They have been prepared at a foundry at Bolton, and are consigned to Odessa, whence they will be drawn by bullock-carts 400 miles, to Kieff.

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